

VZCZCXRO6330
RR RUEHGI RUEHRN RUEHROV
DE RUEHKM #0613 1271157
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061157Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0291
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KAMPALA 000613

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: UGANDAN JOURNALISTS THREATENED WITH SEDITION CHARGES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Three journalists from The Independent magazine, including the Managing Editor Andrew Mwenda, were detained over "publication of seditious stories" on April 26. Detectives from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) interrogated the journalists for three hours and later released them on police bond. The police confiscated three computers, a camera and several files on a search warrant for "seditious material." The Government's move against Mwenda, who has close ties with regime insiders, comes as no surprise given the reports in The Independent about the Government's use of safe houses and first-person accounts of torture. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On April 26, three journalists from the privately owned The Independent, a bi-monthly news magazine, were detained over alleged publication of seditious and defamatory stories. They were released on police bond after three hours of interrogation. The journalists include the Managing Editor, Andrew Mwenda, Contributing Editor, Charles Bichachi, and a reporter, John Njoroge. A recent story in The Independent magazine recounted alleged UPDF atrocities in northern Uganda as it battled the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, and the use of torture in government safe houses to quiet the story's source, a Ugandan military deserter.

¶3. (U) Mwenda told P/E Chief on April 27 that he was questioned about a series of stories he was writing on safe houses. He also said he was grilled about a USD 200,000 consulting and public relations contract he has with private Rwandan firms. The same edition of The Independent carried a prominent spread on doing business in Rwanda. Mwenda stated that his close ties with regime insiders was also the subject of the police questioning. Museveni's former legal advisor, Hussein Kashillingi, told P/E Chief on April 30 that Mwenda's sources within State House provided him with accurate information, which worries those around the President. Mwenda said that the Government has intimidated printers from printing the highly popular magazine, forcing Mwenda to go to different companies for each edition.

¶4. (U) Mwenda's arrest follows an earlier raid on March 27 during which GOU security forces failed to apprehend the deserter, who was the source of the story. On March 5, Mwenda was interrogated by the detectives from the Media and Political Unit of the Criminal Investigation Division for two hours over another story he published about the political and economic dominance of the Bahima, President Museveni's ethnic minority group, in the government.

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COMMENT
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¶5. (SBU) Mwenda joins six other independent journalists who currently are facing similar charges of sedition or criminal libel. These arrests come against the backdrop of Minister of Information and National Guidance Kirvuna Kivejinja's (September 2007) warning to the independent media not to report on the first family, the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, and national security issues. Bold, outspoken, and well-connected, Mwenda remains undeterred by the threat of arrest, and will likely continue writing about sensitive issues. Mwenda has challenged the laws against

criminal libel, sedition, defamation and sectarianism at the Constitutional Court, a case that stems from a 2006 arrest. Mwenda will be appearing in court on May 7, where he may be formally charged. Recently, he was named by the World Economic Forum among the "Young Global Leaders" for 2008. He spent 2006-2007 at Stanford University to escape Government harassment after he wrote an article about the First Family's "fleecing" of the Government resources for personal perks.

BROWNING